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GOD A GREAT KING.

"I am a GREAT KING, saith the Lord of hosts."—Malachi, 1 : 14.

In these words God asserts his kingly authority. He claims to be the great Monarch of the universe.

The sovereignty which God here asserts is not that over the natural world, but over the moral world. Nor is it so properly that which consists in the *disposing of events* in the moral world, as that which consists in his administering over it a *moral government*—a government of *law*. There is a distinction to be observed here. God exercises his sovereignty in *disposing of events* in the moral world, in such way as to fulfil his eternal purposes. He turns the hearts of men as he pleases, even as the rivers of waters are turned. But this species of sovereignty is not so properly denoted by the term *King*. This term, which God applies to himself in the text, rather leads us to contemplate him as *administering a government* like other kings—a government of *law*, over free, intelligent subjects. God has seen fit to create innumerable beings, of different orders, and to endow them with intellectual and moral powers. He has made them after his own image; capable, like himself, of knowing and doing their duty; fit subjects of *law* and *government*. And he has undertaken to administer such a government over them. He has undertaken to be their *King*, and to exercise over them a kingly power. He has given them laws for the regulation of their conduct. He has promised rewards to the obedient, and threatened punishment to the disobedient. He has erected a high and holy throne, and sits upon it. He has taken the sceptre in his hand, and claims to administer a government of law over all the intelligent creatures which he has made.

In administering such a government, it is obviously necessary that the great Monarch of the universe, like every other monarch, should be particularly *guarded* on certain *essential points*. In the first place, he must maintain his own *honor* and *glory* as a Sovereign. He must do this, by seeing to it that his laws, and penalties, and promises, and dispensations are all perfectly *right*. They must be, and must be seen to be, *holy, just, and good*. The least defect here would be an everlasting dishonor to him, and would detract just so much from the regard which was due to him as a sovereign. Were it seen that his law was too strict or too lax; that it required or threatened too much, or too little; that he was partial in his rewards, or cruel in his punishment; in short, that any part of his administration was otherwise than holy, just, and good; his glory as a Sovereign would be tarnished, and the stability of his throne would be seriously threatened.

Secondly; it is moreover incumbent on the Supreme Being to maintain his *dignity* as a Sovereign. He can no more degrade himself, than he can deny himself. He can no more do that which is inconsistent with his dignity, than that which is inconsistent with his holiness or truth. He cannot even gratify his *benevolence* at the expense of his dignity. He cannot consistently do that which might be prompted by mere benevolence or pity, if, in order to this, he must descend beneath what was proper for him as the Sovereign of the universe, and degrade himself in the eyes of his subjects.

I remark, thirdly, if God is to administer a government of law, he must maintain his *authority* as a Sovereign, and the honor and authority of his *law*. He must cause himself to be revered, and his holy law to be respected. Obviously a government of law, whether on a large or a small scale, can be maintained in no other way. Let any Sovereign begin to trifle with his law—to exact beyond it, or to fall beneath it—to withhold its rewards when merited, or to remit its penalty on slight and insufficient grounds, and suffer the transgressor lightly to escape; and he cannot long continue his government. It cannot be long before himself and his law will be trampled on at pleasure, and his government will be subverted and overthrown.

In reference to the points to which I have here adverted, it is important that every Sovereign, great or small, should be strictly guarded. Not even the head of a family, or the teacher of a common school, can maintain his authority without being guarded here. But several reasons may be assigned why this is of very *special* importance to the great Monarch of the universe.

1. His government is of *vast extent*. Did it reach to only a few subjects, he might be less cautious as to his measures. Were it limited, like the monarchies of earth, within comparatively narrow bounds, he might be less strict and vigilant in his administration. But the government of God is, I had almost said, (and perhaps I might truly say,) *boundless*. It stretches from world to world—beyond all known or assignable limits. It includes myriads upon myriads of intellectual, immortal beings, all subject to the same

law, all held by the same indispensable obligations, and all accountable to the same absolute and almighty Sovereign. And now if this Sovereign is to sit upon his throne, and maintain it, and wield his sceptre over all these countless myriads of intelligent minds in heaven, on earth, and throughout the universe; who does not see that he must maintain the *honors* of his throne—must maintain inviolate his sovereign *dignity* and *authority*?

There are many things which God may do, and not endanger the stability of his government. He may roll aside the visible heavens as a flaming parchment. He may dash material worlds out of existence at a word, and re-create them at another word. But he cannot trifle with his law. He cannot trifle with his dignity and authority as a Sovereign. These must be guarded and secured *at any rate*, or a government so vast as that which he has undertaken to administer cannot possibly be maintained.

2. Another reason why it is of indispensable importance that the great Monarch of the universe should guard well the points to which I have adverted, grows out of the *character* of his subjects, or at least of a portion of them. Had God created no intelligent beings but those of the feeblest capacity—who were but a single remove from the brutes—who could look but a little way, and know but little either of themselves or their Creator; it would be of less consequence in what manner his government over them was administered. Defects might occur, and yet never be perceived; or, if perceived, might be glossed over to their satisfaction. But God has been pleased to create different orders of intelligences; and some of them, we know, of the brightest, noblest capacities and powers. He has been pleased to surround himself, more especially in his upper temple, with angels and archangels, cherubim and seraphim, spirits of towering height and glowing intelligence, who are capable of looking into every part of his administration—of scanning and scrutinizing his works and ways. And not only so, a portion of the lofty spirits whom God has created sustain to him the attitude of *enemies*. They have cast off his authority, broken his laws, and raised the standard of rebellion against him. Still, their existence has not terminated, nor is the keen eye of their intelligence dimmed. They still live in the presence of God, and watch the course of his administration, and watch it with the *intent* to find occasion of objection and murmuring, if they can. Now it is over all these bright and glowing intelligences—friends and enemies—those that love him and those that hate him—in heaven, on earth, in hell, and throughout the universe—it is in *their* presence, and under *their* eye, that the great God has set up his throne, and is carrying on his government. He shrinks not from their closest scrutiny. He throws himself all open, so far as possible, to their survey. He calls upon them to look him in the face—to look through the whole course of his administration, and to testify against him, if they can. Now is it not perfectly obvious, in view of all these circumstances, that the great Sovereign himself must be specially guarded as to what he does, or suffers to be done, under

his government? Must he not see to it, that nothing takes place to tarnish the honors of his throne—nothing that will not bear the strictest scrutiny? Must he not guard his law with a sleepless vigilance, and maintain it unbroken, and to the last iota, throughout the universe?

3. It still farther appears that it is of indispensable importance for God to guard well the points to which we have referred, since, from his very nature, he cannot descend to the *shifts* which other sovereigns sometimes make in order to evade these points; or in case of a failure, he cannot resort to such *excuses* as other sovereigns may with propriety offer. For instance, should a case of transgression go unpunished under the government of a father, a school-master, or a petty earthly monarch, he might save his authority by pleading that he did not see the evil committed. It did not fall under his eye. It took place behind his back, or when his attention was turned another way. But the great Monarch above can never justify himself by such an excuse as this. For he is omniscient. He sees and knows every thing. No circumstances of seclusion can be conceived of, through which his eye does not intuitively penetrate. There is no darkness where the workers of iniquity can hide themselves from him. If the law is transgressed in any part of his immense dominions, he must instantly see it; and if the transgressor escapes a merited punishment, he must be privy to it, and responsible for it, to the universe of intelligent minds.

Persons in authority sometimes do not *wish* to see instances of neglect or transgression which take place among those who are subject to their control. If they see them, they will feel constrained to notice them publicly, and to inflict punishment. And to avoid this necessity they choose not to see them. But the omniscient God cannot descend to any such shift as this. He *must* see every instance of neglect or transgression which takes place under his government; and seeing it, he must dispose of it publicly, according to the principles of eternal justice, and in a manner to satisfy the universe of intelligent minds.

If transgression fails to meet its reward under human governments, the sovereign sometimes justifies himself by pleading his *inability*. The offence was of such a nature, or it took place under such circumstances, that he was not *able* to punish it as it deserved. But it is obvious, if God suffers the offender against him to escape punishment, he can never justify himself in this way. He can never plead his *inability* to inflict it, because he is every where present, and every where *omnipotent*. Wherever and whenever an offence takes place, he is on the spot to see it, and is in the present possession of the almighty power to punish it. However formidable the transgression may be, or however numerous and mighty the confederacy engaged in it, they are all before him as the moth, and he can crush them with the utmost ease.

When defects are discovered in the administration of other monarchs, they may plead, in excuse, that they do not *pretend to be perfect*. They do not profess to administer a perfect government,

and this is not to be expected of them. But the great Monarch of the universe can never resort to *this* excuse. He *does* pretend to administer a perfect government; and he challenges the combined wisdom of the universe to invalidate his pretensions in a single instance. He has spread out before his subjects his entire *law*, for their inspection and scrutiny, as well as for their observance. The rewards of obedience, and the penalties of disobedience, are alike exposed to their view. The trial which he affords to his creatures, his mode of treating them while on trial, the judgment which he passes on them, and the retribution he assigns them, are all naked and open to myriads upon myriads of deeply interested and watchful eyes; and he calls upon them all to judge for themselves, and charge the *least* defect upon him—the *least* deviation from absolute perfection, if they can. He has even appointed a *day* for this very purpose—the day of “the revelation of the righteous judgment of God”—in which he will unfold to the assembled worlds the whole course of his previous administration, and give them an opportunity to see for themselves, whether or not he has verified his claim to perfection, and done, in every instance, right. And now I ask, administering his government under these *peculiar* circumstances, and with all these considerations pressing upon him, is it not incumbent on the Divine Being to *guard well the honors of the throne*? Must he not see to it, that nothing is done, or suffered to be done throughout his dominions, to tarnish in the least degree his glory, or detract from his dignity as a Sovereign? Must he not maintain, at all events, his sovereign authority, and the authority of his law, and cause it to be respected throughout the universe?

Perhaps some may think that this watchful care for the law is of no importance to God, since, being in the possession of omnipotence, he can, under all circumstances, do as he pleases. But it must be borne in mind, that the subject before us is one with which direct omnipotence has no concern. It is as much incumbent on a mighty monarch as a weak one, and on one possessing *almighty* power as on any other, in administering a government of *law*, to maintain the *honor* and *authority* of law. It is as possible for a mighty monarch as for a weak one to disgrace himself in the eyes of his subjects—to forfeit their confidence—to become the object of their deserved contempt; and when he has done this, he can no more govern them by the operation of *law*, than though he were destitute of power. He may, indeed, still farther disgrace himself by crushing them down, and grinding them to the dust; but in this case his government becomes one of *force* and not of *law*—the administration of a tyrant, and not that of a holy and righteous Sovereign.

Were it possible for God to *resign* his government—were he to abdicate his throne, and yield up his sceptre; he might be released from those *obligations* of government which are now upon him. But so long as he undertakes to sit upon a throne, and wield a sceptre, and administer such a government as his—so vast in extent—so closely scrutinized—and (as he claims) so absolutely

perfect; it is obvious there are many things which he can with no propriety do. He cannot degrade himself. He cannot deny himself. He cannot do any thing which is inconsistent with his honor, or with the honor or authority of his law; any thing to impair the confidence or diminish the obligations of his subjects; any thing which shall give them the least occasion to charge him with weakness, or injustice, or with the slightest deviation in any instance from the eternal principles of holiness and truth.

The above discussion gives rise to several *interesting reflections*. And,

1. We see the importance of the official work of *the Father* in the great scheme of man's redemption. It is obvious to every one who looks into the subject of redemption at all, that the offices of the Son and Spirit are of indispensable importance in this great work. The Son must become incarnate, suffer, and die, to make expiation for sin. He must rise from the dead, and ascend into heaven, to make intercession for his people. The Spirit, too, must descend, and carry on and complete *his* appropriate work. He must enlighten dark minds, and break hard hearts, and form and prepare lost souls for heaven. Every one, I repeat, who attends to the subject of redemption at all, must see, at once, that the offices of the Son and Spirit are indispensable. But many have been led to doubt and inquire respecting the official work of the Father. What does it devolve on *him* to do in this stupendous scheme of redemption? And how much importance is to be attached to *his* appropriate office and work? To these questions the foregoing discussion furnishes an answer, and presents it before us in a strong light. While the works of atonement and sanctification are going forward, through the official agency of the Son and Spirit, it is the province of the Father to sit upon the throne and *guard the honors of the law*. While the Son is divesting himself of his heavenly glory, and making his entrance into our flesh and world—while he is lying in the manger, enduring reproach and persecution, agonizing in the garden, and bleeding on the cross; and while the Holy Spirit is striving, and being resisted—knocking at the sinner's heart, and being repulsed—is renewing and recovering lost souls, and preparing them for heaven; while these things are going on, it is, as I said, the peculiar province of the Father to see to it that no dishonor is put upon the law; that not one iota is detracted from its binding authority; that nothing is done to degrade or weaken the Divine government, and so render it contemptible in the eyes of intelligent beings. It is to the Father on his throne, and in his *official capacity*, that the sacrifice of the Son is offered, and his intercessions are presented. It is the Father who accepts the sacrifice, hears the intercession, sends down the promised Spirit, and who, when the sinner is renewed, forgives and saves him with an everlasting salvation, and all this in perfect consistency with the honor and glory of the Divine government; so that when the pardoned sinner is received into heaven, and made a partaker of its eternal joys, it shall be seen by all those glowing

intelligences that God is glorious and just, and that the stability of his throne is rather secured than impaired by the exercise of redeeming mercy.

2. We see, in view of the foregoing remarks, why, in all parts of the Bible, and throughout the entire scheme of Gospel mercy, so much honor is put upon the *Divine law*. No one can look into the Bible, the Old Testament or the New, without being impressed with this important fact. When the law was to be delivered to the Israelitish church, God came down upon the flaming mount, attended by adoring angels and surrounded with every possible token of magnificence. And when the law had been delivered, we find it deposited alone in the inmost recesses of the tabernacle and temple, in the *most holy place*, where it was approached by no foot except that of the high priest, and by him only once in a year. It was on the mercy-seat, which covered the tables of the law, that the blood of atonement was annually sprinkled. Before it the holy incense was offered. Upon it stood the cherubim with extended wings. Above it dwelt the dazzling Shekinah, the mysterious token of the Divine presence and glory.

And this high honor which was put upon the law under the former dispensation, was continued and extended under the new. "Think not," says Christ, "that I am come to *destroy the law* or the prophets. I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from *the law*, till all be fulfilled." Our blessed Saviour here does as much as to say, that *the heavens and the earth*, by which phraseology was then understood the *material universe*, with all its array of suns, and stars, and systems, and worlds—that *the whole* might better be swept away, and be dashed in ruins, than that one jot or one tittle should pass unfulfilled from the holy law of God. But I need not quote passages in proof of this point. The *entire scheme of gospel mercy* is so planned and arranged in every part, as to put the highest honor upon the *Divine law*. For what, I ask, did the Saviour die, but to honor the broken law? And what is that *repentance* enjoined in the Gospel, but repentance for having transgressed the law? And what is the *forgiveness* promised in the Gospel but a remission of the incurred penalty of God's holy law? And what is that *salvation* which believers are encouraged to expect on the ground of the Gospel, but a deliverance from the curse of the law, and a renewed heart to obey its precepts? In short, all the means, motives, and influences of the Gospel are aimed directly at this one point, to bring back the sinner from his wanderings, and hold him, henceforward, in his allegiance to the law. This characteristic feature of the Gospel is too manifest to be mistaken by any observer; and the *reason* of it is obvious, in view of the preceding discourse. God has undertaken to administer a *government of law* over the universe of intelligent creatures; and in order to do this, he *must maintain* inviolate its authority and its honors. Especially is this incumbent on him under a dispensation of *mercy*, in which he proposes to remit the penalty

of the broken law to myriads upon myriads of transgressors, and receive them back to his bosom and his love. In carrying out such a plan of mercy, special care must be taken, and special provision made (such as we have seen *are* made in the Gospel) to secure the honors of the law, else the effect of the plan will be to tarnish its honors, and weaken its authority, and impair, if not subvert, the government of Jehovah. Obviously no scheme of mercy could ever be tolerated under the Divine government, which was not so planned and arranged, in every part, as to put the highest honor upon the law of God.

3. It is further evident from what has been said, that in order to understand the dispensations of Jehovah, we must steadily contemplate him as a *Sovereign*—"a great King." We must keep constantly in mind his *duties*, his *claims*, his *obligations* as a Sovereign. If he were not a Sovereign, and were released from his obligations as a Sovereign, he might do many things which he cannot with any safety or propriety do now.

It is sometimes insisted, for example, that *the law of God* is not adapted to man in his fallen condition. It is too strict. It cannot be obeyed. And why is it not, in some degree, abated? Why does not God consent, in accommodation to the weakness and perverseness of man, to relax something of the strictness of his law? In answer to inquiries such as these, I have only to say, that God is "a great King." He has a great kingdom to govern, and to govern by the force of law. And to abate one iota of his law would be to dishonor and impair it. His law is perfectly good now. It requires not at all too much or too little. And for him to alter or relax it, in accommodation to the weakness or wickedness of man, would be to dishonor it and to disgrace himself. It would be inconsistent, not only with his obligations as a Sovereign, but with holiness, goodness, and truth.

It is sometimes asked why God cannot abate something of the *penalty* of his law. Why must he needs threaten transgression so severely? Or if he threatens, why must he needs inflict to the full amount of the threatening? Why does he not abate *something*—at least in its application to poor fallen man—of that dreadful penalty which he has affixed to his law? To these inquiries I answer as before: God is a *Sovereign*. He has undertaken to administer a government of law over friends and foes—a government which stretches to the farthest bounds of the created universe. And the penalty of his law is *no more* than sufficient to sustain its authority and manifest adequately his holy hatred of sin. Indeed, in numberless instances which have occurred already, this penalty has been found *insufficient* to deter from sin. For God to abate any thing of it, therefore, would be only to *weaken* the binding force and authority of law. It would be to detract from the *motives* to future obedience, and thus encourage greater transgression. In short, such a procedure, on the part of God, would be not only unjust to himself as a Sovereign, but unsafe to all the interests of the universe.

It is often demanded, and, as many think, with great plausibility, why may not God consistently pardon sin without an atonement? Why may he not remit the penalty of his law to the transgressor, at least, to the *penitent* transgressor, without first resorting to the strange expedient of offering up his own Son as a bloody sacrifice upon the cross. To all this I reply again; *God has undertaken to be a Sovereign*. He has undertaken to administer a vast moral government—a government of *law*—over the universe of intelligent minds. In order to this, it is indispensable, as we have seen, that the *honor* and *authority* of law should be *sacredly guarded*. If this point can be secured, God can consistently pardon sin; but *not otherwise*. And it was simply to secure this point, to magnify the law and make it honorable, that the great atonement was demanded and made. For God to pardon sin without an atonement, would manifestly be to dishonor law. It would be to weaken and subvert law. And it was simply to meet this difficulty, to sustain that law which sinners had broken, and thus render it safe and just for the great Monarch of the universe to pardon and save them, that the Son of God came down and died.

It is sometimes asked why God cannot *release* those, or at least a portion of them, who are suffering his displeasure in the other world. Why should he close up against them every door of hope, and make them the monuments of his *eternal* wrath? Why not suffer them, or at least a *part* of them, at some period in the long progress of eternity, to escape? To bring this matter to the test, let us suppose that at some period in the progress of their eternal existence, a part of the prisoners in hell, or (if the objector pleases) only *one* of them, Judas Iscariot, for example, does escape. He leaves his prison, and comes out, and roams at large among the creatures of God, or ascends up to the mansions of light. A new *fact* has now occurred under the government of God; and all eyes are instantly turned towards it, and all are anxiously inquiring together into the reason of it. "*What does this mean?*" By ten thousand angels and ten thousand devils the inquiry is at once started, "*What does this mean?*" Judas certainly was a sinner—a great sinner. He certainly died in impenitence, without an interest in the Saviour. He was accordingly doomed to suffer the terrible penalty of the law and to be miserable for ever. But he has escaped. He is at large. And how is all this to be accounted for? He surely did not escape because God had not the power to retain him, for God is omnipotent. Nor did he escape because God was not present to see and observe him, for God is every where present, and sees all things. God must then have been privy to his escape. He must have aided and abetted in it. And *what does this mean?* What *can* it mean, but that God has at length discovered that his law is too strict, that its threatenings are too severe, and that sin is not so great an evil as he once pretended?"

In view of the fact here supposed, I see not to what other conclusion than this the intelligent universe could come. And having come to such a conclusion respecting God and his law, would it

be possible for God, henceforward, to retain the affections and confidence of his creatures anywhere? "If Judas has been released and taken into heaven, others may be permitted to follow him. Even Satan himself may hope, in due time, to ascend up where he was before; and that, too, not because he shall have repented and submitted, but because it has been discovered that his punishment is not just. And if Satan is released and taken to heaven on such grounds, who knows but that Gabriel may be cast out of heaven and sent down to hell? If God has been unjust in one instance, who knows but he may be in another? In short, who knows any longer what to depend on, or what to expect, under the government of God?"

Manifestly, all confidence in the great Sovereign of the universe, in the rectitude of his law, and the stability of his government, would now be lost. And this being lost, the government of God must henceforth be one of mere *force*, or must be *annihilated*. Revolt would follow revolt, and rebellion succeed rebellion, till anarchy and revolution should prevail every where and become universal.

I conclude this general topic with repeating what was said when I entered upon it. In order to understand the dispensations of God, and the reasons of them, we must steadily contemplate him as a *Sovereign*. We must keep in mind his *claims*, his *obligations* as a *Sovereign*. Governing, as he does, unnumbered worlds, and that, too, by mere force of law, he *must* guard well the honors of his law. He *must* be strict to maintain its authority. He must not suffer one iota to be detracted from it. If in any instances he may seem severe, it is because, as a *Sovereign*, he must be so. He delights in the exercise of benevolence and mercy; but he cannot exercise either of these attributes at the expense of justice, or in a way to endanger the great interests of the universe. Indeed, it is benevolence on a wider scale which prompts the Divine Being to protect his law, and to take all the measures requisite in order to its protection. It is benevolence which prompts him to declare, "till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled."

In concluding this discourse, I will only say further, that, as the subjects of God's holy government, it is incumbent on us all to *study* this government, that we may understand it. It is moreover incumbent on us to *bow* to it, and *rejoice* in it. We have nothing to fear from the justice of God or the strictness of his law, so long as we love and obey him. And though we have dreadfully sinned against him, still we have nothing to fear, if we will now repent and turn to God, and bring forth fruits meet for repentance. It is only the *obstinate, persisting rebel*, who will not repent and sue for pardon, that God's law smites and his government crushes; and every such rebel a holy government ought to crush.

Persons of this character have, indeed, every thing to fear from the operation of that government which has been described. For their holy *Sovereign*, they may be sure, will never yield to them.

His law will not be modified, or its strictness abated, or its penalty relaxed, to favor them. Persisting as they are, they rush directly on the thick bosses of his buckler. They rush upon the point of that flaming sword which is lifted up to destroy them. Persisting as they are, they will soon be in that world of fire which has been kindled to consume them, and from which there is no escape or deliverer. We have seen already that the material universe might sooner pass away and be no more, than that one impenitent, unpardoned soul should be released from its prison, and escape its destiny, in the other world.

Let us then hear, and fear, and do no more wickedly. Let us stand in awe, and sin not. And for all that we have sinned, let us repent, and mourn, and humbly seek forgiving mercy. We are now indulged with precious privileges, the effect of all which will be, if they are not worse than lost upon us, to bring us back from our wanderings, and confirm our allegiance to God and his law. May such be their happy effect upon us *all*; and may we all be prepared to sing, now and for ever,—what we are assured they sing in heaven,—“Allelulia, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.”

SERMON CCLXXXIV.

BY NOAH PORTER, D. D.

FARMINGTON, CONN.

GOD THE STRENGTH OF HIS PEOPLE.

“He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.”—Isaiah, 40:29.

This was said with primary reference to the captive church in Babylon; cut off from human aid, and abandoned to the will of her enemies, she was inclined to despondency; as though God himself had forgotten his promises, or were unable to fulfil them. It was in prospect of this that Isaiah was inspired to deliver and record for her admonition and encouragement a considerable part of his interesting prophecy; and, among the most interesting parts of it, the passage which includes the text. “Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God? Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? There is no searching of his un-

derstanding. He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall. But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint." These animating assurances and appeals are no less applicable to us, (and to the people of God in all ages,) than they were to the Jewish captives. Our strength, both for the purposes of our individual existence in the present world, and for the cause to which the true Israel from age to age are devoted, is not in ourselves, but in God alone; and as this is obviously true with reference to whatever natural strength of body and of mind is necessary for these purposes, so also it is true especially, and, as I apprehend, according to the spirit and design of the text, with reference to the moral strength, the power of faith, the energy of purpose, the strength of holy fortitude, and patience, and disinterestedness, and zeal which they demand. It is with particular reference to this that it is said, "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."

It may then be useful for us to dwell upon this truth, a truth cheering to the humble, and one of which we all need to be often reminded—that *God is the strength of his people*. In illustration of the text, I would refer you,

I. TO THE CONDITION OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD AS BEING WITHOUT STRENGTH.

II. TO THE FACT THAT GOD STRENGTHENS THEM.

III. TO THE METHOD OF HIS WISDOM IN DOING THIS.

I. *I would refer you to their condition as without strength.* I do not speak of their natural capacity. Man was created in God's own image; and though fallen, he retains the faculties of his high original. As an intelligent and moral being, he is possessed of godlike powers; but as to their proper result, he is feeble—in the language of an apostle, he is "weak through the flesh," by depravity he is without strength, he has no might, and what man is, as fallen, such are the people of God, except as grace makes them to differ. Their moral strength, in respect to its source, is not in themselves but in God alone. In themselves they are without strength, whether considered in relation to their duties, their trials, or the cause to which they are devoted.

They are without strength in relation to the duties incumbent on them. So Paul found himself to be. Hear his lamentation over himself. "To will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not.—For I delight in the law of God after the inward man. But I find another law in my members warring against the law in my mind, and bringing me into captivi-

ty to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death!" Such every person finds himself to be who understands in the same manner the nature of the divine law, and endeavors with the same zeal and perseverance to obey it. That law demands not external morality alone, but internal holiness, the exclusion of all selfishness, pride, covetousness, envy—demands absolute purity of love, reverence, humility, submission, gratitude, and good will. Obedience to it on the part of fallen men involves a complete revolution in their governing intentions, affections, and motions, "a new heart and new spirit." To begin this, to break away from the dominion of sensible and worldly objects, and come under the influence of things invisible and spiritual; to renounce all selfish and worldly ends, and seek as his main end the glory of God in doing good; to be no more conformed to this world, but transformed in the renewing of the mind,—whoever has seriously made the attempt, has found to be, not of himself, but of the grace of God alone; and, having begun, to persevere he finds to require the continued influence of the same grace. The grace which he may have had yesterday avails not for to-day; the good impressions, the pleasant frames, the pure and pious intentions which he then enjoyed could not perpetuate themselves. On the contrary, he is surrounded with influences which tend continually to draw off his mind from the objects of faith, to damp the ardor of his spiritual affections, to corrupt the purity of his governing intentions, to shake the constancy of his obedient purposes, and thus to bring him down from the moral elevation to which faith had raised him, to a level with the men of the world. Hence the conflict in which all the language of the Bible supposes christians to be engaged; hence their need of continual watchfulness and effort; and hence the prayerfulness, which, having done all, they find it indispensable to maintain, casting themselves helpless on God; and with all humility and gratitude uniting in the acknowledgment, "Lord, thou hast wrought all our works in us."

They are without strength, also, in relation to the trials incident to their lot. There are afflictions under which nature, unsupported, droops and dies. Thousands have met them in the midst of their joyousness and hope, and from that moment have been inconsolable. So absorbing have been their griefs, as to pall their sensibility to remaining good, drink up their spirits, and sink them by swift degrees into the grave. From such afflictions the people of God have no exemption; and under them they too have been found weak as other men. Not only philosophy and friendship, but their former faith and piety, have been insufficient to sustain them. See Job cursing the day of his birth. There was none in all the earth his equal—a perfect man and upright—and for a season he sees his earthly hopes swept away with an even mind—he bears his personal sufferings also with serenity; under loads of sorrow and disappointment, he is still resigned, and thankful, and joyful in God; but at length the spirit fails—hope

is lost—he yields himself to the mighty pressure; he says, “O that he would hide me in the grave. Cursed be the day wherein I was born.” See Jacob, when Joseph’s blood-stained coat is presented to him, rending his clothes and refusing to be comforted, saying, “I will go down into the grave, unto my son, mourning.” See David, when Absalom’s death was announced to him, going up to his chamber, and as he goes lamenting, “O my son Absalom, would to God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!” How extravagant! how unmeaning! And what are we, that we should pretend to be better able than were those servants of God to sustain the evils of life?

If under heavy affliction we are apt to despond, we are apt also to repine. It is on this account that they are called trials. They are like the furnace to the gold. They put our faith and submission to the proof. They make obedience difficult. It is, in truth, on account of the difficulty of sustaining, in the trial of afflictions, an active trust in God, and a cheerful acquiescence in his allotments, that we are so apt to sink under them; acquiescence and trust being, in their nature, peace. Nor are afflictions our only trials. There are smiles of prosperity as well as shocks of adversity; there are allurements as well as buffetings of the world; there is an even course of personal gratification as well as a succession of painful disappointments, which make it difficult for us to maintain that humble trust in God, that spirituality of mind, that constancy in prayer and obedience, which belong so essentially to the life of godliness. Temptations of some sort are inseparable from our present state; and what occasion we have to pray that if we must needs be subject to them, they may be only those which are common to men, or that we may have strength proportionable to bear them! how weak the best of men have been found in themselves when exposed to them, the sacred page affords us solemn and repeated admonitions. There is Abraham, the father of the faithful, turning aside into crooked ways lest strangers kill him for the sake of his beautiful wife. There is Moses, the meekest of men, indulging himself in passion and in pride at the waters of strife. There is David, the man after God’s own heart, going up to his neighbor’s bed, and then shedding that neighbor’s blood to cover the atrocious crime. And there is Peter, one hour protesting to his Master, “Though all men should deny thee, yet will not I,” and then next denying with oaths and imprecations that he knew the man. The experience of all the world has shown that the best of men, if left to themselves, may commit the greatest of sins; that there is no man who, if not prevented by divine grace, may not commit any iniquity; that the firmest resolution against it, when measured with the strength of appropriate temptation, is utter weakness, and that therefore it becomes every one who, for a course of years, has held on his way of steadfast obedience, to say, “It is not I, but the grace of God that has been with me.”

If in relation to their duties and their trials, the people of God

are without strength, much more are they so in relation to the advancement of the cause of religion in the world. If they are insufficient to work out their own salvation, how should they be sufficient to save others—to convince them of sin, and convert them to God; to transmit to a succeeding generation the knowledge of the truth and the ordinances of grace; to cause the Gospel to triumph over the error, irreligion, and licentiousness that oppose it, and deliver the captives from the power of the mighty? All this is to be done, to be done by them; and how, Christ has told us; “Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world.” “The Comforter, even the Spirit of truth,—whom the world cannot receive, he abideth with you, and shall be in you.” “He shall testify of me, and ye also shall bear witness.” “And he, when he is come, shall reprove the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment.” The apostles also explained it, when, speaking of their success as “ministers of the New Testament,” they said, “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God.” Again, “We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us.” The people of God, then, are without strength, and I would now more directly refer you,

II. *To the fact that God strengthens them.*

By this I mean that he gives them not only the ordinary supports of his Providence, but also the special influences of his grace; not only that he preserves them in being, sustains their intellectual and moral faculties, and affords them the moral restraints and influences which are common to men, but that he vouchsafes to them the grace which is effectual to their performance in different degrees of the duties incumbent on them—their perseverance with joyfulness, amidst the trials which befall them, and their successful prosecution of the cause of truth and holiness in the world. They are “strengthened by his Spirit in the inner man;” “strengthened with all might according to his glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering, with joyfulness,” not merely capable, as other men are, of doing the will and subserving the cause of the Redeemer, but endowed by his Spirit with the moral energy,—the strength of faith, and love, and fortitude, and zeal necessary for this purpose. That God does, in this manner, strengthen his people, appears from his promises and their experience.

It appears from his promises: “Fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God; I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.” “My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness.” “God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will, with the temptation, also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.” “As thy days, so shall thy strength be.” “The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord; though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the Lord upholdeth

him with his hand." To whom do these precious promises belong? They are the common inheritance of those who, by the faith of the Gospel, are reconciled to God. "That by two immutable things, by which it is impossible for God to lie, they may have a strong consolation who have fled for refuge, to lay hold on the hope set before us; which hope we have as an anchor to the soul, both sure and steadfast."

In accordance with these promises is the testimony of experience. Witness the experience of Abraham, of Moses, of David, of the apostles, by whom, though weak as other men, such wonders of grace were done both in their acts of faith and the success of their efforts in the work of redemption. Witness the whole list of worthies of whom the apostle makes mention to the Hebrews, who, "out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens;" and, what is far more glorious, "wrought righteousness, obtained promises, and were tortured, not accepting of deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection." Witness the multitude of the people of God, in all ages; for which one of them all in the endless variety of duties, services, and trials allotted them, and notwithstanding their conscious weakness, and temporary defeats and backslidings, has not upon the whole been sustained in the faith and patience of the saints, and been carried triumphantly through? Witness also the preservation and progress of the church of God by their means from age to age. Fires of persecution and floods of temptation, the power of states and the subtlety of Satan and his hosts have been employed to destroy her, and still she sits and sings, "God is our refuge and strength, therefore will we not fear. The Lord of Hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge." The Lord will give strength to his people.

III. *The method of his wisdom in doing this.*

It is by engaging their confidence in him for this purpose. His effectual aid is free and sure to all those who will depend on it according to his word. He deems himself bound in honor to meet the trust that is reposed on him. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in the Lord for ever; for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength." This implies these three things; that they distrust their own strength; that they repair to God for strength; and that, in the confidence that he will afford it, they go forward in the path which he opens.

They distrust their own strength. Most gladly, said the chiefest of the apostles, will I rather glory in my infirmities:—for when I am weak then am I strong. So it is with the people of God generally. Such is their experience at their conversion. They learn by trial that they are weak; in the mighty work of their salvation they faint; in conflict with the opposition that is arrayed against them they have no might; feeling that they have none, they cry. "Lord, save us, we perish:" and so out of weak-

ness are made strong. So it is in their perseverance and progress. The promises are to "the poor and needy;" "the poor in spirit, and the contrite in heart." "The Lord will save the afflicted people, but will bring down the high looks." "When Ephraim spake trembling, he exalted himself in Israel." So it is in the triumphs of grace by their means. They are made sensible; often, by painful dispensations, that it is not their own arm which gets them the victory, nor for their own goodness' sake that it is achieved; but that it is by the power and grace of God alone. See Moses, in his youthful ardor, how forward to interpose his arm for the defence of his people; presuming that they would understand how, by him, God designed their deliverance; and, because they did not, how soon to flee into the wilderness; and forty years afterwards, when really called of God to the work, how overwhelmed with a sense of his weakness in comparison with it. See Jehoshaphat, on the eve of a glorious victory over enemies rushing upon the land as a flood. "O our God," said he, "we have no might against this great company that cometh against us, neither know we what to do; but our eyes are unto thee." As with individuals, so also it is with the people of God collectively. See the Israelites in Egypt. It was not enough that they were reduced to the lowest vassalage under a haughty and powerful king. That the mighty hand and the out-stretched arm of Jehovah might be more conspicuous in their deliverance, it was necessary to bring them in greater extremity. They must have been driven out in haste, and pursued by Pharaoh and his army, and hemmed in at the shore of the Red Sea. Then it was that the right hand of the Lord got him the victory in their ransom. Such is the method of divine wisdom in dealing with his people. For the Lord shall judge his people and repent himself for his servants, when he seeth that their power is gone and there is none shut up or left.

As they feel their weakness, so also they repair to him. An explicit trust in God is not less indispensable than distrust of other help. Despondency is no less fatal to success than self-confidence; unbelief, than false security. He must be trusted according to his word; our trust in him must be expressed by application in the way provided; and that application must be continued, though to human view it may seem vain. They that *wait* on the Lord shall renew their strength.

And in the confidence that he will sustain them, they go forward in the path which he opens. It was when the man with a withered hand, at the command of Jesus, stretched forth his hand, that he found it obedient to his will. It is they who run that shall not be weary, and they who walk that shall not faint. It is strength in the race, and not before it is begun, that is promised; it is grace in the day, for the day, and not for days to come, that we are warranted to expect. That is not trust in another, which is not obedient to his will. The most wonderful act of faith that perhaps was ever rendered, was acknowledged as an act of obe-

dience. Now I know that thou *fearest God*, said the angel to Abraham, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me. Accordingly, at the Red Sea, Moses was commanded to say to the Israelites, as the test of their trust in the promised salvation of God, "go forward." It was not enough that they cried unto the Lord. They were to prove their sincerity by obedience. Nor were they to wait till the waters were divided; but while yet their only path was in the rolling deep, the word was given, "Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward." Such is trust in God. Such is the state of mind in which God gives strength to his people.

1. We may learn from this subject why it is that the people of God sometimes appear like the rest of mankind. When we read the histories of good men, as of Noah, Lot, Abraham, David, and other distinguished saints under the Old Testament and the New, we may wonder to see them at some times so unlike themselves at others; to see them, after having raised our admiration of their constancy in the severest trials, falling before comparatively feeble temptations; to see them weak and frail as others of our sinful race. So in the circle of our acquaintances, we may wonder to find those whom we have seen on some occasions humble, serious, disinterested, and devout, on other occasions proud, passionate, selfish, or vain—altogether unlike, so far as we can perceive, what we had supposed them to be. And some of us may wonder, most of all, to find our own selves at some times so very different from all that we had been, or thought and hoped ourselves to be, at others. The explanation of this lies in the fact, that neither we nor others have any sufficiency of ourselves. We are too apt to calculate on principles of grace as being in their nature permanent; to imagine that, being once renewed, our disposition to holiness will remain by its own tendencies; that having once begun to love God, we shall continue to love with little variation and little conflict, and to expect that christians around us will, for the same reason, exhibit an unbroken consistency of character. But it is not so. Christians are no less dependent than sinners. They have in themselves "no might." And it is because they forget this; because they lose the deep-felt sense of their weakness, and proportionably remit their watchfulness, and prayerfulness, that in the same degree they feel and live as do others. While their course, as a whole, exhibits such unity of character as proves that God will not forsake them, it also exhibits such variation as shows that their strength is in him alone.

2. We may also learn how it is that the people of God sometimes go far beyond themselves in their exercises of holiness and strength of consolation. Whoever is conversant with the Scriptures may easily call to mind instances of this. The apostles on the day of Pentecost, and Stephen in his dying moments, are memorable examples. And who that has been conversant

with christians in times of revival, in scenes of affliction, or on their dying beds, has not marked the same thing? Who has never seen in those who have waited on the Lord, when they have come to die, a vividness of spiritual apprehensions; a steadfastness of peace; a benignity, a sweet and heavenly serenity of soul, like the dawn of heaven, beaming forth in their aspect and accents, entirely beyond what he had been accustomed to see in them. In all this there is only what the Scriptures warrant us to expect of those who make God their trust. We see him giving power to the faint.

3. Sinners have no occasion to fear becoming religious lest they should not hold out. Let them look well to their sincerity; let them see that it is religion itself which they desire, and not the comforts and the safety alone which belong to it; let them be hearty and unreserved in their choice, and in the choice commit themselves to God, through Christ, the Mediator of the new covenant; and they shall find that covenant "well ordered in all things and sure." Sure as God is faithful, not one of them shall be lost: but they all shall be kept by his power, through faith, unto salvation. It is true that many who set out in a religious course draw back, to their shame and ruin; but they were at the first partial and double-minded in their religion; they never cast themselves singly and wholly on God in Christ as their portion and trust; they always sought their own ends in distinction from his glory, and in dependence on themselves, not on his promised grace. No wonder that, in this way, even the youths should faint and the young men should utterly fall. Though it be so, it still remains true, that "they who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;" instead of losing their religion shall grow stronger and stronger; "shall mount up with wings as eagles; shall run and not be weary, and shall walk and not faint."

Finally, we have no occasion to fear entering upon any path which God opens to us. What though that path be dark, and we know not where it will end? Is it not enough that He who opens it has said, "Fear not, I am with thee?" What though it introduce us to services untried, difficult, and responsible, and the consequences of failure to ourselves and to others be dreadful? Be we only satisfied that those services are really appointed to us, shall we not believe him, when he says, "My grace is sufficient for thee?" What though afflictions repeated and overwhelming lie along that path? Is it not the path marked out for us by the bloody footsteps of our great Forerunner? Is it not in this very way that the God of all grace designs to make us partakers of his glory? Breaking our earthly arm, that we may lean upon himself; drying up our failing streams, that he may bring us to the living fountain; and cutting off our expected delights, that he may make us serene and joyful in himself without them? "O ye afflicted, tossed with a tempest and not comforted, behold and consider that presently your stones shall be laid with fair colors, and your foundations with sapphires. Your windows

shall be of agates, and your gates of carbuncles." It is but a hand-breadth, ye humble children of sorrow, and you shall be dismissed, refined, and purified by these afflictions, and made meet for glory. Even now the dawn of the upper world beams through the clouds that darken your horizon, and soon those clouds shall all be dispelled; and under the full beams of the Sun of righteousness shining upon you eternally, you shall say, "In thy presence is fullness of joy, and at thy right hand are pleasures for evermore." And what though your path-way into this felicity bring you to the river of death,—and there is no turning to the right hand or the left; and there, leaving kindred and friends behind, you must conflict alone with the cold waves? Have you not seen others, fearful as you, when they have come to the cold flood, borne peacefully through? Have you not seen their fears dispelled, the billows parted before them, and the way opened for them to go through dry-shod? And is He who has done this for them less sufficient for you? "Fear not," is his word to every faithful follower. "I am the first and the last. I am he that liveth and was dead; and behold I am alive for evermore, Amen—and have the keys of death and of hell." And will you not commit yourselves to Him in whose heart is such love, and in whose hands is such power? Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto Him be glory in the church, by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end.